THE RACE FOR JAPAN

By ADOLF FREITAG

Today, when we see Japan as one of the leading powers of the world, it is hard to realize that no more than ninety years have passed since the first arrival of Perry's "black ships" in the bay of Yedo. It is an irony of fate that three of the four powers which were then so insistent on Japan's taking part in world politics—the United States, Great Britain, and Holland—have lost all of their rich possessions in East Asia under the blows of that same Japan whom they had drawn into the international play of forces against her own will.

The author, a German historian now living in Japan, has once more brought to life the period of Japan's opening up.—K.M.

ON a sunny day in the year of 1640, seventy-four persons were put to death on a small island in the bay of Nagasaki, and their ship, with all that was on it, was burned. On the evening of the same day, Japanese officials erected a notice board on the place of execution, facing the sea. On it was written: "As long as the sun shines, let no foreigner dare to enter Japan. This ban is irrevocable for all time!"

In this way the relations between the West and the island empire of the East had come to an end after approximately a hundred years. The reason for this was that the Japanese statesmen decided to put a stop to the interference of individual Westerners in Japanese domestic affairs. Only the Dutch received permission to carry on a very modest trade with Japan.

The Japan of the next two hundred and ten years has often been compared with that beautiful princess of the fairy tale who, in a magnificent castle behind a barrier of thorns, lies in a deep sleep, waiting for her deliverer. But it is only the Westerners who speak of sleeping Japan. In actual fact, the Japan of the late Tokugawa Period was, in spite of sheathed swords and the blessings of peace, filled with movement and restlessness. In spite of the constriction of all life in rigid forms, it was a time of profound social upheavals. New ideas were being born, ideas which have lost none of their effect in the Japan of our day and which are being strongly encouraged. For the ruling shoguns, the Tokugawa family, the maintenance of outward peace was, in these circumstances, the prerequisite of their rule. As soon as their power of seclusion and defense toward the outer world weakened, their domestic power was bound to totter and collapse.

THE COMING OF THE RUSSIANS

The first thrusts at the Japanese islands were to come from the north. Within an incredibly short time the Russians had crossed the wildest parts of Siberia and reached the coast of the Pacific. From the islands off this coast they turned their eyes toward the south, toward the country of whose wealth and sunny climate they had heard so much. As early as the first half of the eighteenth century the Russians began their voyages to Japan. Indeed, an event of momentous consequences for the future! Two nations had met: for better or for worse, they were never again entirely to lose contact.

The sudden appearance of these *aka hito* (red men), as they were first called in Japan, was quite a shock to the Japanese. They were immediately aware of the special nature of the Russian voyages to Japan. Had they been undertaken to open up a trade route to the islands? Doubtless. But they certainly also represented an attempt to advance the

territorial borders of the empire of the Tsars to Hokkaido. Consequently, the Japanese guards on Hokkaido were forthwith reinforced and the coasts fortified.

The first large-scale expedition was organized by the Russians during the reign of Catherine II. Scholars and merchants set out on a warship under the command of the Finn Laxmann. The vessel called at Hokkaido, but after months of waiting the Russians were only advised to proceed to Nagasaki. That, the Japanese said, was the only place where, according to law, contact with foreigners was permitted.

The next enterprise was of a more serious nature: Japan was to be included in the world-encircling communications of the Russian America Trading Company. In 1804 the well-known circumnavigator of the world Krusenstern took the Russian plenipotentiary Rezanov to Japan, this time straight to Nagasaki. Although Rezanov was allowed to hand over his imperial message, he also received a negative reply: "Any relation between you and us is impossible. Hence it is our will that your ships henceforth avoid our waters!" We are told that the Japanese permitted Rezanov to come ashore, but that, in their annoyance at his overbearing behavior, they assigned to him as a dwelling, not a temple compound, but a shed in which fish had recently been dried. The result was a kind of state of war in the northern waters. In order to force the Japanese to comply, the Russians took measures of reprisal and plundered Japanese settlers on the northern islands. The Japanese, in turn, gave chase to Russian ships and in 1811 managed to take a Russian captain prisoner. This man was Captain Golovnin, whose interesting book about his imprisonment in Japan attracts many a reader to this day.

The Russian attempts had been repulsed. But the excitement in Japan over these attempts did not die down so quickly. Questions regarding the northern border have always found a wide echo in Japan. When it was reported that shipwrecked Japanese were forced to give Japanese lessons in Russia and that, moreover, a school for the study of Japanese had been established in Irkutsk, all this seemed to the Japanese to point to dishonest intentions on the part of the Russians. There are not a few Japanese books from those times dealing with the empire of the Tsars, and we know that even high government officials discussed the pros and cons of reciprocal communications. But decades were to pass before the Russians could again turn to Japan.

WHERE WERE THE DUTCH?

During all this time the Dutch were living in Japan, familiar with the ways of dealing with her people. If anyone, were not they qualified to take a leading part in the opening up of the country?

They had been allotted the island of Deshima in the bay of Nagasaki to live on, and it was here that during the Tokugawa Period a very peculiar bit of interstate communications took place. With every ship from Batavia the Dutch on Deshima received renewed instructions "by all means to maintain the friendship of the Japanese by means of great modesty and humility." They followed these instructions loyally and, as a result of the endless limitations, privations, and humiliations they were forced to accept, they lost the esteem and respect of the ruling class of Japan, which despised money. Nevertheless, other seafaring nations and merchants of those times would gladly have been in their shoes. This is indicated not only by examples from China—Canton, for instance, where for some time the Europeans carried on their business under similar conditions—but especially by the repeated attempts, mainly on the part of the British, to supplant the Dutch in Nagasaki.

Let us relate one of these attempts. During the Napoleonic wars the Dutch on Deshima remained entirely without news from the outside world. Then suddenly, in July 1813, two ships appeared in the bay. They were English, passing themselves off as Dutch. Now the dismayed Netherlanders learned that their country had become French and

that all their possessions in the East had passed into English hands. Sir Stamford Raffles, the new master of Java, demanded that Deshima be handed over. The Dutch manager, Doeff, did not hesitate for a moment. He refused stubbornly, and he remained firm when the British returned one year later to repeat their request, this time more positively and threateningly as well as with attractive promises. Finally, in the summer of 1819, after nineteen years of seclusion on a reclaimed, walled-in little island 200 meters long by 70 meters wide, the seven Hollanders left Deshima, the only place in the world where the Dutch flag had waved throughout all these years.

PEEPHOLE TO THE WORLD

Through Deshima, this little window in the west, a thin but ceaseless stream of knowledge flowed in from the Occident and flowed out from Japan. There were enough Japanese willing to risk life and liberty in order to become acquainted with the Western spirit and sciences. But official Japan also had an interest in the Hollanders: they had orders to submit annual reports on world events to Yedo and, in addition to this, to report important matters without delay. Thus Perry's expedition as well as that of Putyatin were reported in advance by them. The Japanese officials possessed a good general knowledge about world affairs and the world itself. Much to Perry's amazement, for example, they pointed without hesitation to New York on a globe, as well as to various European states named by Perry.

The Dutch also made two attempts to persuade the shogun to give up or at least modify his policy of seclusion. But, in view of the position and standing of the Dutch in Japan, these attempts were doomed to failure. Unheeded was the letter sent by the King of Holland to Japan in 1844. "This, O high and mighty ruler," wrote the Dutch sovereign, "is our friendly counsel: moderate the strictness of the law against intercourse with foreigners, so that happy Japan may not be devastated by war."

ENGLAND AND FRANCE

Where, in this race for Japan, were the two powers whose lust for oversea conquests and whose resulting rivalry since the eighteenth century determined the fate of vast territories outside of Europe? It was this very rivalry that shackled the strength of England and France, so that only weak radiations of this strength reached the islands in the utmost east. An early English attempt, made in 1673, throws an interesting light on the situation of that time. Equipped with royal authority, the *Return* arrived in Nagasaki and requested that trade relations be taken up. This caused the Dutch some anxiety, since the Japanese decree of exclusion was originally directed only against the Portuguese and Spanish. So they hastened to throw suspicion on their rivals. As a result, the English were given the following reply: "We have given careful consideration to the letter of your King. But you may not trade here, as your King is married to the daughter of the King of Portugal. Depart, and do not return!"

Thus there are only records of a few English whalers driven by storms into Japanese ports, until the growth of the British colonial empire and the increasing traffic in the China Seas brought about a change. As we have seen, the attempts to take the place of the Dutch failed; and, although the British ships grew bolder and bolder, ordinary efforts on the part of the Japanese authorities were always enough to repulse them. In 1846, a French squadron found a ready ear for their request for good treatment for shipwrecked mariners; but further requests were ignored. For the time being, both powers were more interested in the events in China. Their hour in Japan was to come later.

AMERICA ON THE PACIFIC

For the European states, Japan was beyond their maritime route to the East. For the United States, this was no longer true. With the growing population on her West Coast, the USA became a nation

on the Pacific. Rapidly increasing numbers of American whalers and China traders ventured out onto this ocean. Did they not need ports of call and refuge in the vast expanses of this sea? Indeed, the new steamboats were absolutely dependent on a coaling station between San Francisco and Shanghai. The Japanese islands were suited for this purpose, and America was ready to act.

In Washington, the idea soon arose of sending special envoys to Japan, and all missions sent off during the thirties and forties of the last century to look after American trade interests in the East also carried instructions for Japan. They never got there. After the signing of the treaty with China, however, America would accept no further delay. In 1846 Commodore Biddle with his two warships lay for ten days in vain off Uraga. The letter he carried from President Polk was not accepted. Time was pressing. Were other states to get in ahead of America? There was already some definite news that Tsar Nicholas had lately been taking a renewed interest in Japan. At the end of 1851, one Admiral Perry was entrusted with this difficult task, and his fleet was now on its way to Japan.

PERRY'S ARRIVAL

On a hot July day in 1853, four American warships sailed into the bay of Yedo and cast anchor in front of the little town of Uraga. The commander of this fleet was Matthew Calbraith Perry.

Who was this man Perry? The world was soon to know. There have been few undertakings of this kind which, in big and little things, in merits and in blunders, in preparation and execution, were stamped to such an extent by the personality of their leader as the undertaking with which Perry had been entrusted by America.

Perry had made a careful study of all available reports on the Land of the Rising Sun and had come to the conclusion that its isolation from the world, far from being founded in its national character, had been forced upon it. He was convinced that the right treatment would lead him to his goal and that his own country was qualified to open up Japan to the rest of the world.

"It seemed to me to be the only possible policy, not to deviate from my intentions and rather to take upon myself the reproach of stubbornness than that of complaisance," he said. The diplomat Perry was backed up by the squadron commander Perry. He refused to go to Nagasaki and sailed even farther into the bay. As a rule, the Japanese let no one ashore, while they themselves investigated every nook and cranny of the foreign ships. Perry, however, drove off all visitors and permitted only the highest-ranking of the negotiators to come aboard. He himself remained at first invisible. He explained his attitude later by saying: "I always kept away from subaltern officials by letting those people know that I would associate only with princes of the empire." The President's letter was handed over with great ceremony. When Perry announced that he would return for the answer in spring, the Japanese wanted to know whether he would return with all his ships. "Certainly with all four, probably with more," was his reply. With his ships stripped ready for action, he sailed out of the bay. Nobody doubted that he would return.

PUTYATIN'S FLEET

This was on July 17. Less than three weeks later the Dutch reported to the Governor of Nagasaki: "A Russian fleet is approaching Japan. Its task is to follow the movements of the American fleet."

Even before the message could be relayed to Yedo, four foreign ships arrived at Nagasaki (August 20, 1853). It was the Russian fleet which, after a voyage from Kronstadt (near St. Petersburg) lasting almost a year, had finally arrived in Japan. Putyatin, the chief of the squadron, immediately asked for permission to hand over a letter from the Tsar addressed to the "Prime Minister of Japan." (President Fillmore's letter had been addressed to the "Emperor of Japan.")

"The excitement in Nagasaki," one report says, "at the arrival of the Russians can hardly be described." The Governor was exceedingly embarrassed. He had not as yet received any exact reports as to what had happened to the Americans in Uraga. What attitude was he to take? Plead with the Russians to turn back? Use force in case they refused? Instructions from Yedo were slow in coming.

Meanwhile, the conduct of the Russians had removed many obstacles. Reciprocal calls and hospitality became the order of the day. Both sides, it is true, had taken precautions against surprise attacks, and the tedious question of etiquette entailed a certain amount of dissonance in the relations. Even quite harmless questions were regarded with suspicion. "How many inhabitants are there in Nagasaki?" a Russian officer asked one day. "Sometimes more, sometimes less," the Japanese official replied diplomatically, and both laughed heartily.

But withal the Russians were by no means happy. The Crimean War was already casting its shadows ahead and surprised both parties in the midst of negotiations to which the Japanese had finally consented. No agreement was reached for the time being about the northern border. However, Putyatin was given the promise that, should Japan actually open her ports one day, Russia would be the first to enjoy this privilege. Then the Russian fleet had to hurry off to the north.

BELATED COUNTERMEASURES

Once or twice only in her history had Japan been threatened by foreign enemies, and these occasions were being remembered now that the armed emissaries of two mighty empires stood at her gates, spreading confusion and dismay.

No one can maintain that all this came as a surprise to the shogun government. It was well informed about the change in affairs in its neighboring countries, and the letter of the Dutch king had, after all, specified the danger as long as ten years previously. Nevertheless, nothing had been done to improve the neglected defenses of the country. In Uraga, for instance, one of the main fortresses in the bay of Yedo, there was, at the time of Perry's approach, only enough ammunition for ten cannon salvos. Now, during the short breathing space granted by the Americans, the government went to work. Cannons were repaired, troops called up, keels laid for larger ships, and the Dutch were asked for the necessary books.

Too late! The government went about all these measures in a halfhearted way. Perry's letter had been accepted to gain time. But then the Russians came. There was a clash of opinions in Yedo. Assuming that the border questions were settled, what disadvantages could there be in trade relations with the Russians? Then they might even be willing to help drive off the Americans.

Too late! An obsolete regime was undermining its own foundations in its feeling of impotence. The shogun acquainted the great of the land with Perry's demands and requested their attitude. The daimios snatched at the chance, hitherto denied them, of freely expressing their opinion. The cry "Hail the Tenno! Out with the foreigners!" was their reply. This now became the battle cry of all those who were anti-foreign, but also of all those who—becoming bolder and more numerous now—rose in bitter hostility against the shogunate. Domestic opposition had found a dangerous rallying point.

PERRY TRIUMPHS

But let us return to Perry. Only a few days after the departure of the Russians from Nagasaki (February 13, 1854) he appeared for the second time off Uraga. He had nine of his "black ships" with him. With this proud squadron he sailed even closer this time to the capital of the shogun.

His first question was about the Russians. Their presence in Japan had caused him all the more anxiety in China since he had rejected Putyatin's proposal for united action in Japan. Moreover, France and England were also making preparations to send expeditions to Japan.

For these reasons he had shortened his stay in China.

The Japanese agreed to negotiate, and Perry crowned his second visit with the treaty of Kanagawa. It was the first treaty concluded by the island empire with a foreign power according to international usage. The signing took place on March 31, 1854.

Perry's name was echoed around the globe. His was the victory and glory, and it had been a bloodless victory. But let us not be deceived: it was the success of a man of war rather than of a man of peace. There can be no doubt that Perry would have used force if the negotiations had come to nought. He himself repeatedly mentioned acquirement of territory in such a case, as well as a hundred warships which he could assemble. After the first favorable beginnings, Perry advanced the goal of his negotiations further than provided for by the President's letter. In order to enjoy its victory to the full, the American squadron, on leaving, sailed to within sight of wildly excited Yedo. In his diary, Well Williams, Perry's interpreter, comments: "If a man is a commodore, he can do as nobody would in order to show that he can do as he likes."

AND THE OTHERS?

It was not the Russians who opened the series of Perry's fortunate successors. While Putyatin was lying impatiently at the mouth of the Amur, the British Admiral Stirling arrived in Nagasaki in September 1854. "I am looking for the Russian fleet!" was the excuse he gave for his intrusion. The Japanese, quick to recognize the importance of firm agreements with belligerent states, concluded the Anglo-Japanese treaty of friendship a bare four weeks later. It was not until the end of the year that Putyatin risked a voyage to the south with only one ship, and soon after Russia was also among the treaty powers. She was followed by the fourth and, for the time being, last nation, the Dutch, who had every reason to wish to improve their humiliating position.

The Russian agreement deserves a moment's attention. First of all, there are the circumstances in which it was concluded, which deserve to be told. This time Putyatin had gone to Shimoda on the Izu peninsula. The day after his arrival, an earthquake and, in its wake, a huge tidal wave, afflicted the little town and its harbor. Putyatin's only ship was rendered entirely unseaworthy, and five hundred shipwrecked Russians were now on land. Out at sea, the enemy was cruising. And the Japanese? Who was to prevent them from treating the Russians as troublesome intruders? Nothing of the kind occurred. On a remote piece of land the Russians began the construction of a large schooner. The Japanese not only helped them at it, they also asked them to build a second boat for themselves.

As recently as the spring of 1942 we were reminded once again of this first Russo-Japanese agreement of 1855. For it was during last year that Japan abrogated the remains of what were known as the "perpetual leaseholds" in the ports of Kobe and Yokohama, a system based on the principle of extraterritoriality. This principle, which was to have such momentous consequences and which was to be so bitterly fought over for so many years, was first laid down in the Russo-Japanese treaty of 1855. Perry had not demanded it.

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Thus the first step in the opening up of Japan had been made. Although Japan's attitude toward the outer world had been clarified, it was by no means settled. Now the curtain rose on a new phase. It includes the twelve years from the arrival of the first American consul, Townsend Harris (1856), up to the entry of Emperor Meiji in the capital of the shogun (1868). It is characterized by vehement struggles for domestic power. The foreigners and their treaties were the objects over which these struggles flared up, spread, and finally died down. Then only did Japan truly enter upon the stage of the world, and after only a few years more she was to become one of the world's leading powers.